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FDR Prosecution Script

**Lawyer**: The prosecution calls Jedediah Johnsonto the stand.

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

**Okie**: I do.

**Lawyer**: Let’s proceed. Can you start by telling us a little about yourself?

**Okie**: Okay, well I was a farmer back in Thackerville, Oklahoma. I had wheat crops, oats, hay, and pasture lands on my farm. I worked so hard to produce only the best, which I was doing for a while, until the Dust Bowl happened.With the outbreak of WWI, wheat was a necessity. The promise of the land had true because of record high prices. I came to Oklahoma with ambition to become a wheat farmer. I wanted to start my own farm. Harvesting wheat was a thrill to me. The roar of the laboring motors and the whine of the combine was music to my ears. I got myself a John Deere tractor and went to plowin’ with my son. I’d run that thing all day; from sun-up to sun-down.

**Lawyer**: What is this "Dust Bowl" that you speak of?

**Okie**: Well, the Dust Bowl was an atrocious drought that brought on huge dust storms. Big clouds of dust would engulf everything around you and made it hard to see. In 1933, there were 38 storms. By 1934, about 100 million acres of farmland had lost all or most of the topsoil to the winds. The topsoil was blown off barren fields and carried in storm clouds for hundreds of miles. The driest region of the Plains, including my home in Oklahoma, became known as the Dust Bowl. Things got so bad that my family and I, like other families, left what little we had left and headed West to San Joaqin Valley, California. There I found work in those fertile lands as a cotton farmer and that is what I am doing now as well.

**Lawyer:** Please give us some more detail.

**Okie:** Whirlwinds had always danced across the fields on hot, dry, days. No one took much notice that these swirls of dust were growing thicker, taller, and faster than usual. Then in the summer of 1931, the rain stopped. Wheat withered in the fields.

**Lawyer:** And I presume that this came as a shock to you?

**Okie:** Yes, no one was prepared for what was to come.

**Layer:** Please describe for us what happened.

**Okie:** The winds unleashed their fury with a force beyond my wildest imagination. It blew continuously for a hundred hours and it seemed as if the whole surface of the earth would be blown away. My fields were completely bare. Secretary of Agriculture Wallace predicted that the drought would be worse than one that had already happened in '34 if we didn't get enough rain by July 20, "I would say that the situation today looks as bad as it did in 1934, when Congress voted us $500,000,000 to meet the emergency".  [From: *FARMERS: Worse Than 1934*].  And Mr. Secretary was right.

**Lawyer:** What were living conditions like?

**Okie:** As dust enveloped the atmosphere, it got into the eyes, the nose, the mouth  breathing became difficult. The Red Cross issued an urgent call for dust masks, especially for children. We’d wear them while we were working. It was a gauze mask that you could never seem to get a real good breath from.

**Lawyer:** Can you tell us about some of your experiences?

**Okie:** Everything was just covered in dirt; everything was full of dust. If you were cooking a meal, you’d end up with dust in your food and you would feel it in your teeth. You’d start to eat and when you would drink water or something, you would grit down and you always felt like you had grit between your teeth. Our farmhouses looked terrible; the dust was deposited clear up to the window sills. And even about half of the front door was blocked by the sand. If people inside wanted to get out, they had to climb out through the window to get out and shovel out the front door. And there was no longer any yard at all there, not a living thing of any kind, not even a field mouse. Nothing.

**Lawyer:** This must have been hard on your family.

**Okie:** Yes, very. When I was in the field my kids were always afraid. They didn’t know whether I could get home or not because the dust was so bad. So my wife and kids stayed at home watching, waiting for me to come in.

**Lawyer:** So what did you do next?

**Okie:** Like I said before, I had to flee to California to avoid being burried by all of the dust. We packed our belongings, and did not even bother to shut the door behind us, we just drove away, with our minds focused on the uncertain road before us. I hoped to find a farm job in California. The trip was long and when my family and I got to California there was a feeling of relief. We thought that things would be better there in our new lives, but we were sadly mistaken.

**Lawyer**: Now that we have established your position, we can get down to business.

What is it that you are accusing Mr. Roosevelt of?

**Okie**: I am accusing Mr. Roosevelt of giving the American people false hope.

**Lawyer:** What precisely did he give you false hope about?

**Okie**: He gave my family, other farmers, and myself false hope about creating a better life for farmers, especially those affected by the Dust Bowl.

**Lawyer**: And how exactly did he do this?

**Okie**: He led us to believe that he would bring real change to the American people, yet he never followed through with his promises.

**Lawyer**: What is it that he promised?

**Okie**: When he addressed the devastation of the Depression, the Roosevelt administration introduced and passed social-welfare legislation that came to be known as the “New Deal.” However, farmers didn’t receive any of the benefits. He had promised us farmers an increased income and thus a better life. He implemented many programs to attempt to do so however the programs failed miserably.

**Lawyer:** Please provide some examples of these failed implemented programs.

**Okie:** One of the best examples I can give you is the Agricultural Adjustment Administration or the AAA.

**Lawyer:** Do you feel that enough programs were put into action to help farmers?

**Okie:** No. While many different programs were directed at farmers, most were failures.

**Lawyer:** The goal of the AAA was to raise prices for merchandise through artificial scarcity. What is your opinion about the Agricultural Adjustment Administration?

**Okie:** The AAA used a system of "domestic allotments," which set a total output of crops such as corn, cotton, rice, tobacco, wheat, as well as dairy products, hogs. The goal intended to force up farm prices. The AAA paid land owners subsidies for leaving some of their land idle with funds provided by a new tax on food processing. However, to meet 1933 goals, 10 million acres of growing cotton plants were plowed up, plentiful crops were left to rot, and six million baby pigs were killed and thrown away.

**Lawyer:** A poll in the *Washington Post* revealed that a majority of the American public opposed the AAA. Would you say that you are included in that majority?

**Okie:** Yes, the AAA did not provide for any sharecroppers or tenants or farm laborers who might become unemployed.

**Lawyer:** In 1936, the Supreme Court declared the AAA to be unconstitutional, stating that "a plan to regulate and control agricultural production is a matter beyond the powers delegated to the federal government...Do you find this to be an example of false hope?

**Okie:** Yes, the AAA was intended to help and not only did it not help; it was also declared unconstitutional. And the AAA actually contributed to the hardship of farm workers.

**Lawyer:** How so?

**Okie:** In an effort to control farm prices, the Agricultural Administration passed a law in 1933 that paid farmers to withdraw land from cultivation in return for cash payments. According to the law, the farmers were supposed to share the payments they received with their tenants and sharecroppers. But most of them kept the money for themselves. And with fewer acres being farmed, more and more tenants and croppers were evicted.

**Lawyer:** The Farm Security Administration was another effort used to combat American rural poverty. What can you tell us about the FSA?

**Okie**: The FSA stressed "rural rehabilitation" efforts to improve the lifestyle of sharecroppers, tenants, and very poor landowning farmers, and a program to purchase land owned by poor farmers and resettle them in group farms with land more suitable for efficient farming. Yet critics, including the Farm Bureau, strongly opposed the FSA.   
  
**Lawyer:** The FSA's primary mission was not to aid farm production or prices. Roosevelt's agricultural policy had, in fact, been to try to decrease agricultural production to increase prices. What do you have to say about this?   
  
**Okie:** In my opinon Roosevelt did not think about the farmers at all when he put this plan into action. Also, when production was discouraged, tenant farmers suffered most by not being able to ship enough to market to pay rents. Many renters wanted money to buy farms, but the Agriculture Department realized there were too many farmers, and did not have a program for farm purchases.   
  
**Lawyer:** In 1933, Congress passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), which gave grants to states “to aid needy persons who have no legal settlement in any one State or Community.” What is you opinion about settlement programs?   
  
**Okie:** The camps provided tents, one-room cabins, and buildings with toilets and showers. But there was only room for 400 families. The camps did not come close to solving the hideous living conditions of most migrant workers. Then  in August 1935, the federal government shut down the federal Transient Service, which had been the sole source of cash relief to unemployed migrant workers during their first year in California. Which once again took away the hope we had just been provided with.

**Lawyer**: Of all the government programs, which one do you feel was the worst?

**Okie:** The cattle slaughter was probably one of the worst. The government came in, took the cattle and killed them, they paid $16 for a cow and $3 dollars for a calf. Once that’s gone, you hardly have anything left. I had milked those cows. They gave us milk and food, then the government comes and just takes their heads off and thinks that the compensation for them would be enough to help us get by. But it wasn't.

**Lawyer:** Can you provide us with a closing statement?

**Okie:** Certainly. I would have to say that I am a critic of the New Deal, I denounce it since many of its ambitious reform ideas failed. The New Deal failed to help the groups most in need of assistance. I feel like FDR missed opportunities and had inadequate responses to problems.   
  
**Lawyer:** Did you have something you wanted to share with the jury?   
  
**Okie:** Yes, I have brought photographs of my former home, in Thackerville, Oklahoma, to inform them how condtions truely are.

**Lawyer**: Thank you, that will be all.



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